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## CLASSROOM METHODS AND DEVICES

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### A PROGRAM FOR VITALIZING SCHOOL WORK

Much has been said in recent years about motivating school work. Generally it has meant, I think, taking materials not intrinsically interesting and making them function in some interesting situation. In meeting the requirements of the "interesting situation" the pupils do enthusiastically a great deal of hard work which otherwise would not be done, because this effort seems to them to have a present useful purpose. The following is an account of a Thanksgiving program which used the "public-entertainment situation" to intensify classroom instruction.

A committee composed of history and literature teachers was appointed to prepare a Thanksgiving program which should reflect the meaning of the day and furnish a pleasant assembly hour for the pupils.

One of the history teachers as chairman of the committee conceived the idea of having a series of pictures presented portraying the life of the Pilgrims from the time of their persecution in England to the observance of the first Thanksgiving Day.

One girl read considerable material on the history of this period and then wrote a narrative covering the facts briefly. This she read. At the proper place in the narrative the stage curtain was lifted and the following pictures, made up of pupils costumed and posed to represent the scene, were presented:

- Home Life of Pilgrims in England
- Prison Scene in England
- Life in Holland
- Making the Compact on the Mayflower
- Landing on Plymouth Rock
- A New England Village (The First Winter)
- The First Thanksgiving

The pictures were presented by different groups of pupils. Altogether there were 133 pupils used in this part of the program.

Each group of pupils studied the history and conditions of the times sufficiently to costume themselves and form the picture properly. Very little practice was necessary and practically no interruption of regular school work was experienced, yet some very lasting impressions, I believe, were made by the study in preparation and the emotional effect attending the presentation. These results are greatest in those who took part in the presentation, hence the wisdom of having a large number of pupils participating instead of a small select group. I believe, also, that the other 400 pupils who witnessed the presentation will have their appreciation for that period of history deepened in addition to the mere matter of enjoying the entertainment.

The other part of the program at first might not seem to belong to Thanksgiving. But the fact that this is a national festival day in the United States seemed to make it perfectly fitting and proper.

Some of the classes in literature were studying *The Man without a Country* and the teacher of one of the groups suggested dramatizing it for this occasion. The pupils took up the suggestion with enthusiasm and when the scenes were planned the teacher had some difficulty in keeping the length of the speeches within such limits as would make it possible for the play to be presented in the available time. They did not consider the careful study of the selection laborious, nor the committing of the speeches a task, but undertook the whole with enthusiasm and willingness. Neither was the labor burdensome to the teacher, for several times she remarked that it was the most fun she had had for years in her teaching.

This pleasure came, as I see it, from the buoyancy of the spirits of boys and girls engaged in a task in which for the time being they lost the sense of being required by someone else to do certain tasks, and placed the requirement upon themselves because of the co-operative present use of the results of their labor.

One very great advantage of the whole experiment was the opportunity for co-operation which was offered to both pupils and teachers. Some teachers who read this may say that it probably was a good thing for the pupils, but that it requires too much nervous energy on the part of the teachers to organize 169 pupils and have the whole performance work through in a smooth and

satisfactory manner. But this is not true, especially where pupils and teachers are organized departmentally in all of the work and are thus used to daily co-operation on a rather large scale.

Much of school work, certainly, cannot be done in this way. But much more opportunity is offered in our history and literature courses than we are making use of at present for a vitalized presentation by pupils. In a similar way in this school the following have been treated: *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Barclay of Ury*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, scenes in *Enoch Arden*, and some historical events.

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